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**Analysis Specificity of Generational Conflict  
in Migration Literature on H. Kureishi's Novel  
*The Buddha of Suburbia***

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**Abstract.** This article examines the peculiarities of analysing the conflict of generations in migration literature on the material of H. Kureishi's novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* is one of the key works of postcolonial prose. The aim is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the generational conflict in the novel. The purpose is not only to relate the characters of the work under study to the wave of migration (first/second generation of migrants), but also to determine their place in the historical process and their belonging to a certain generation, in accordance with the sociological theory. For this purpose, the nature and causes of conflict interaction between first- and second-generation migrants were analyzed. The dominant life and behavioural strategies inherent in migrants' characters belonging to different generational cycles are fixed in the form of oppositions. The result of the research is the disclosure of the analysis specificity of generational conflict in the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Relevant conclusions are drawn, which indicate the crisis of patriarchal-traditional institutions and the destructive nature of values dominating in British society.

**Keywords:** generational conflict, the problem of generations, migration literature, H. Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*

**Conflicts of interest.** The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Специфика анализа конфликта поколений в литературе о миграции на примере романа Х. Курейши «Будда из пригорода»

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**Аннотация.** Рассматриваются особенности анализа конфликта поколений в литературе о миграции на примере романа Х. Курейши «Будда из пригорода» – одного из ключевых произведений постколониальной прозы. Цель – всесторонний анализ конфликта поколений, задача – соотнести персонажей изучаемого произведения не только с волной миграции (первым/вторым поколением мигрантов), но и определить их местоположение в историческом процессе, принадлежность к определенному поколению в соответствии с социологической теорией. Для этого были проанализированы характер и причины конфликтного взаимодействия мигрантов первого и второго поколений. Фиксируются доминантные жизненные и поведенческие стратегии, присущие персонажам-мигрантам, принадлежащим к разным поколенческим циклам, в форме оппозиций. В результате раскрыта специфика анализа конфликта поколений в романе «Будда из пригорода», сделаны выводы, свидетельствующие о кризисе патриархально-традиционных институтов и деструктивной природе ценностей, доминирующих в британском обществе.

**Ключевые слова:** конфликт поколений, проблема поколений, литература о миграции, Х. Курейши, «Будда из пригорода»

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### Introduction

In contemporary literary studies, there is a growing tendency to distinguish works addressing the cultural, social, political, and economic aspects of British migrants' lives as a distinct genre – British Migration Literature (Assmann, 2017).

The generational conflict in migration literature often takes center stage, manifesting as a polemic between the first and second generations of migrants. The first generation of migrants typically includes those born outside the United Kingdom who later immigrated there. The second generation comprises individuals born in the United Kingdom to at least one parent who arrived as a migrant (Assmann, 2017).

The present article focuses on the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) by prominent Anglo-Pakistani writer Hanif Kureishi, frequently regarded by scholars as a key work of postcolonial prose.

This debut novel brought its author widespread recognition and was awarded the prestigious Whitbread Book Award<sup>1</sup>. Reflecting on his literary debut years later, the author himself acknowledges that it was addressed to his parents: “All first novels are letters to one’s parents, telling them how it was for you, an account of things they didn’t understand or didn’t want to hear”<sup>2</sup>.

*The Buddha of Suburbia* consistently attracts attention from both Russian and international literary scholars. Most literary critics examine this text through the lens of identity issues (Borovikov, 2019; Tolkachev, 2013). Despite the focus on migrant characters in these studies, the generational conflict often receives insufficient attention and requires more comprehensive analysis.

The present article undertakes a thorough examination of the generational conflict in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. To this end, the characters of the novel are contextualized not only in relation to migration waves (first/second generation of migrants) but also within their position in the historical process and affiliation with specific generational cycles, in accordance with the sociological theory (Klimczuk, 2015). This interdisciplinary approach facilitates a deeper understanding of generational conflict in migration literature.

## Results and Discussion

Based on the definition of migrant generations, the characters representing first- and second-generation migrants (Assmann, 2017; Lobo, 2020) were identified in the analyzed text, along with *Traditionalists* (1920–1940) and *Baby Boomers* (1940–1960), in accordance with the sociological classification of generations applied to Western European society (Klimczuk, 2015).

The research yielded insights into the specifics of generational conflict analysis in the novel studied (the systematization of research findings is presented in Table). To this end, the nature and causes of conflictual interactions between first- and second-generation migrants were examined. This analysis delineates the dominant life and behavioral strategies characteristic of characters from different generations, framed as oppositions. It is noteworthy that in the analyzed work, intergenerational conflict predominantly emerges within the dyads of interactions: father – son and father – daughter.

Migration literature frequently depicts various pathways of migrant characters’ adaptation in the host country. The protagonist of the novel, teenager-métis Karim, born to a Pakistani father and an English mother, identifies himself as English: “I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories”<sup>3</sup>. This excerpt, reflecting the young man’s deliberations on his belonging, serves as

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<sup>1</sup> In 2005 the award was renamed the Costa Book Awards.

<sup>2</sup> Kureishi, H. (2020, April 25). *Hanif Kureishi on Writing The Buddha of Suburbia*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/apr/25/there-were-no-books-about-people-like-me-so-i-wrote-one-myself-hanif-kureishi-on-the-buddha-of-suburbia>

<sup>3</sup> Kureishi, H. (1990). *The Buddha of Suburbia* (p. 3). Faber and Faber.

a trigger for the subsequent development of conflict between Karim and his father Haroon, which manifests most vividly in the sociocultural dimension and stems from their divergent acculturation strategies.

**The results of the generational conflict analysis in the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia***

Nature	Causes	Generation of Migrants	Sociological generation	Oppositions	Characters	Subjects of Interactions
Socio-cultural	Different adaptation strategies	First	Traditionalists	Separation	Haroon, Anwar	Father – son, father – daughter
		Second	Boomers	Assimilation	Karim, Jamila	
Religious	Different perception of religion	First	Traditionalists	Pseudo spirituality	Haroon	Father – son
		Second	Boomers	Spiritual searching	Karim	
Value-based	Contradictions in attitudes towards success, freedom, responsibility	First	Traditionalists	Basic values	Haroon	Father – son
		Second	Boomers	Personal success	Karim	
Familial	Family discord; protest against patriarch	First	Traditionalists	Individualism	Haroon, Anwar	Father – son, father – daughter
		Second	Boomers	Hyperindividualism	Karim, Jamila	

Haroon, despite his prolonged residence in England (over 20 years), remains poorly adapted to British realities and lacks proficient command of the English language – a circumstance that may signify his subconscious reluctance to assimilate into the dominant group while preserving his ethnic distinctiveness. According to J.W. Berry’s (2002) acculturation theory, Haroon adopts a separation strategy. The man begins to capitalize on his otherness, assuming the persona of a spiritual guru by amassing Eastern wisdom and yoga practices to fulfill the English milieu’s demand for exotic Oriental rituals. This stance contradicts Haroon’s religious identity, as he is a Pakistani raised within the Muslim tradition.

Karim exposes his father’s contrived spirituality and derisively calls him the “Goddy”. Unlike the suburban English residents who perceive Haroon as a spiritual mentor, in his son’s eyes, the father’s “enlightenment” is a fabrication and a means to gain recognition. Karim is more focused on exploring his inner world than adhering to any specific religious convictions. Haroon’s adaptation strategy and aspiration to dominate the new environment rely on his personal charisma rather than his evident intellectual potential, considering his noble Indian heritage.

Haroon’s family placed great expectations on him when sending him to England, anticipating his return to Bombay as a professional and gentleman. Neither his education nor background enabled him to claim the same social status in London that he had enjoyed in Bombay – a circumstance the man himself attributes to discrimination. This example symbolizes the erosion of the father’s authority in his son’s eyes.

From an early age, Karim recognizes that his family’s image diverges from that of British families, which becomes a pretext for bullying by peers. Karim reproaches

his father for negligence in charting his son's future, condemning him to a joyless existence in a London suburb – a realization that fosters an inferiority complex: “Dad had had an idyllic childhood, and as he told me of his adventures with Anwar I often wondered why he'd condemned his own son to a dreary suburb of London of which it was said that when people drowned they saw not their lives but their double-glazing flashing before them”<sup>4</sup>.

This sense of “otherness” induces a fragmentation of Karim's identity. The protagonist is torn between remaining loyal to his family and conforming to the surrounding reality. The hero's personal crisis precipitates conflict with both family and society. The protagonist's adoption of an assimilation strategy emerges because of social alienation and his parents' emotional detachment.

Destructive tendencies are evident in Karim's family, stemming from the parents' despair upon confronting the collapse of their illusions about a happy life in England. Familial discord, marked by emotional detachment and the suppression of problems, ultimately culminates in the family's disintegration when the father leaves for the Englishwoman Eve. Consequently, security and comfort do not invariably equate to happiness. Man's individualistic aspirations are shaped by the influence of Western societal values; wherein personal freedom supersedes familial obligations. The father ceases to serve as a transmitter of cultural values to his son, precipitating the family's dissolution and leaving Karim frustrated and disoriented for years. Notably, the home literally empties, losing its original significance (the mother relocates to her sister's, while the father and Karim move to Eve's). The father's departure wounds Karim, who is already subjected to bullying by “white” peers – a phenomenon typical of English schools in the 1960s. As a result, the teenager fails his exams and drops out of school. Karim's situation is further exacerbated by witnessing his mother's depression due to the father's betrayal. However, the young man proves incapable of supporting her, as this behavioral pattern was never instilled in him within the family. The protagonist's helplessness in the face of his mother's suffering, the betrayal and loss of his father – inextricably linked to a sense of self-loss and hope for a new “self” – are also intertwined with a generational crisis.

In migration literature, the motif of home loss directly correlates with the forfeiture of the integrity and harmony of the past world. The loss of family and ensuing alienation initially propel the protagonist toward a search for inner support, fostering hyper-individualistic aspirations characterized by excessive emphasis on autonomy, hedonism, and self-realization.

Contemporary Anglophone prose writers frequently depict such children seeking stability and spiritual-emotional closeness beyond the family as an attempt to “...rid themselves of their own inner emptiness” (Baranova, Afanasieva, 2023, p. 29). When Karim's family disintegrates, he embarks on a quest for new refuge, hoping to find the warmth and comfort he has been denied. Karim discovers support

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<sup>4</sup> Kureishi, H. (1990). *The Buddha of Suburbia* (p. 23). Faber and Faber.

in the ambitious Englishwoman Eve, who serves as his guide into London's upper echelons and aids his advancement in an acting career.

Turning to the generational conflict, which unfolds against a backdrop of discrepancies, parents immigrating to England strive to secure a basic level of well-being for their children, something they would lack if they remained in their homeland. However, during the 1970s, the English struggled to reconcile themselves with the influx of "colored" populations. The coming-of-age of second-generation migrants often occurs amid overt rejection and racism. In other words, the migration of the first generation exerts a negative impact on their children's social status, as the migrant parents themselves are deprived of full participation in social life. Nevertheless, the availability of this baseline well-being enables the second generation to focus on existential concerns. It is thus unsurprising that issues of self-definition and exploration of otherness form the core of Karim's identity formation and mindset (Vikulova et al., 2020, p. 32).

The contradictions between son and father are further intensified by their belonging to distinct cultural worlds. Haroon represents the *Traditionalist Generation* (1920–1940), characterized by a propensity for conservatism, discipline, and respect for hierarchy. Although Karim's exact birth year is not specified in the text, it can be inferred that he was born around the 1950s, considering the chronology of events and his age at the narrative's outset. Consequently, the young man can be classified as belonging to *The Boomer Generation* (1940–1960) (Klimczuk, 2015). At seventeen, Karim is influenced by the cultural revolution of the 1960s, whose markers include pop music, instant fame, money, sexual liberation, and drugs. The protagonist's aspiration to merge with the dominant culture – contrary to his inherent nature – is embodied in the text through the plotline of Karim's homosexual attraction to Charlie, Eve's son. Charlie, a punk teenager who achieves instant fame and becomes an idol for his generation, functions psychologically as Karim's literary double, reflecting the "Englishness" of his nature (Merkulova, Satyukova, 2010). Through the device of doubling, the author illustrates the absurdity of a migrant's attempt to "merge" with the image of the Other. Underlying Karim's desire to emulate Charlie's path – manifested as overt protest against societal norms – is the subconscious aggression of the adolescent migrant confronting British xenophobia.

It is noteworthy that in the 1970s, England emerges as the epicenter of youth punk culture, which originated in the United States during the 1960s, underscoring the influence of the era's broader cultural backdrop on migrant characters. As the narrative progresses, the idealized image of Charlie, who fails to cope with his own fame, crumbles in Karim's eyes, leading the protagonist to recognize the destructive nature of the prevailing values in British society – a hallmark of "...crisis states in social evolution" (Vikulova et al., 2011, p. 197).

Haroon, despite his own readiness to expand the boundaries of the permissible, remains under the sway of Muslim traditions. Hints of his son's homosexual inclinations provoke the man into manifesting overt aggression toward him, thereby

exacerbating the emotional chasm between father and son. According to Karim, his personal degradation commences precisely with the father's hypocrisy: "...my introduction to serious betrayal, lying, deceit and heartbreaking"<sup>5</sup>.

The protagonist's journey of self-discovery begins with the loss of home, leading through the hostile and corrupt world of the metropolitan beau monde, whose quintessence in the novel is embodied by America, where the hero temporarily finds himself. Karim attains solace upon returning to his roots, to family and loved ones. The novel's circular composition symbolizes the path of inner transformation for both father and son. The final episode of the aged Haroon's reunion with Karim is intertwined with motifs of forgiveness and mercy. Haroon evolves from a domestic tyrant and pseudo-guru into conscious co-creation, resolving to abandon his job and offer support to London residents mired in strikes and demonstrations. Essentially, Haroon's trajectory exemplifies the English proverb "fake it till you make it", which functions as a psychotherapeutic method, enabling him to surmount his crisis. Karim secures a role in a soap opera promising money and recognition, yet it fails to bring fulfillment. True hope emerges only through his return home.

Another illustration of intergenerational family conflict in the analyzed novel is the discord within Jamila's family, Karim's friend. Family relations are marked by tension, particularly concerning Jamila's libertarianism, which is incompatible with her father's Muslim worldview: "There had been years of smoking, drinking, sexual intercourse and dances, helped by there being a fire escape outside her bedroom and the fact her parents were always so exhausted they slept like mummies"<sup>6</sup>. Anwar seeks to marry his daughter off to the Pakistani Changez, viewing this as a means of preserving cultural continuity. To this end, the man resorts to a hunger strike to coerce his daughter into compliance. The uncompromising manner in which the father attempts to manipulate his daughter's fate, disregarding her own preferences, attests to his fear and reluctance to accept the new realities of their life. By fulfilling her father's will, Jamila effectively sacrifices herself yet achieves moral superiority over him. Jamila's rebellion against patriarchy leads her to affirm her own worldview. Disillusioned with the traditional family, she opts for an alternative path – life in a commune, which emerged in the 1960s as a form of protest against the prevailing social order. The conflict between Anwar and Jamila reflects the migrant's struggle to assert authority through radical measures amid the shifting cultural landscape of modernity.

## Conclusion

The specificity of generational conflict analysis in migration literature lies in its comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach, grounded in the sociological theory of generations and the characters' affiliation with migration generations. Applying this methodology to the generational conflict in Hanif Kureishi's novel *The Buddha*

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<sup>5</sup> Kureishi, H. (1990). *The Buddha of Suburbia* (p. 115). Faber and Faber.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. P. 62.

of *Suburbia* yields the following conclusions. The generational conflict in the novel manifests as contradictions between the first and second generations of migrants. First-generation migrants are *Traditionalists*, while the second generation comprises *Boomers*, imprinting distinct worldviews upon them. Intergenerational discord in the novel emerges predominantly within father – son and father – daughter dyads, signifying the erosion of paternal authority and the crisis of the patriarchal family. The dominant life and behavioral strategies characteristic of migrant characters from different generations can be framed as oppositions: assimilation versus separation; pseudo spirituality versus spiritual quest; basic values versus personal success; individualism versus hyperindividualism. Positive transformations in characters and their life orientations are observed upon confronting new realities, which shapes the genesis of the conflict and fosters harmonization of relationships (Haroon – Karim). Conversely, rigidity of views and inability to achieve personal transformation and compromise among conflict participants lead to a negative conflict trajectory (Anwar-Jamila). This attests to the crisis of patriarchal-traditional institutions and the destructive nature of dominant values in British society. Thus, there is a pressing need to formulate a new constructive value system responsive to contemporary challenges and capable of serving as an ontological foundation for modern generations.

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